



Creativity and Aging: Best Practices
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The National Endowment for the Arts seeks to make the arts more widely accessible to older adults by engaging them in professional and participatory art programs and increasing awareness among arts and aging professionals and practitioners on the link between the arts and wellness.

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Alzheimer's Poetry Project

Santa Fe, NM



(Erin Fredrichs/Tribune)

The Alzheimer's Poetry Project (APP) involves people with dementia in poetry programs that include poetry readings and helping participants express their feelings through poetry. The goal of the Poetry Project is to enhance the quality of life for people with memory loss, their families and health care workers who serve them. The program finds that even in the late stages of the disease, reciting poetry helps to spark people's memories, remembering words and

lines from poems and stories of their youth.

Fifteen professional poets, who receive training on working with the targeted population, work with APP to conduct programs in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Washington, DC. Also, APP has convened training sessions for over 200 professional healthcare workers and twenty high school students to encourage and assist poetry programming for people with dementia. In 2005, APP and the Poem Factory published "Sparkling Memories: The Alzheimer's Poetry Project Anthology" that is a collection of well-known and loved poems.

Arts for the Aging, Inc.

Bethesda, MD

Since 1988, Arts for the Aging, Inc. (AFTA), has been providing artistic outreach in adult day centers and non-profit nursing homes in the metropolitan Washington, DC area. AFTA's mission is to work closely with these centers to foster participation of older adults in creative and stimulating arts activities. AFTA provides 85 programs monthly in more than 50 senior facilities in the metropolitan Washington, DC area.

AFTA's art programs are ongoing and employ professional artists. They include dance, drawing, drumming, music, painting, poetry, sculpture, cultural outings, art lectures and intergenerational programming.



Burbank Senior Artists Colony

Burbank, CA



The Burbank Senior Artists Colony is a 141-unit senior apartment community sponsored by More Than Shelters For Seniors, the City of Burbank and Meta Housing Corporation. The Artists Colony features a senior theater group, independent film company, fine arts collective, and an intergenerational arts program in partnership with the

Burbank Unified School District. A collective committee with three sub-divisions, representing the Visual, Performing and Literary arts, determines how to support members and promote their artistic interests.

[Acting Dynamics](#), a class that meets once a week, utilizes acting techniques for the purposes of self-expression and artistry while developing performance skills for community productions.

[Dance Classes](#) offer a step-by-step approach toward educating participants about various cultural and folk dances. Emphasis is placed on the artistic form and cultural genesis of the dances.

[Creative Writing Classes](#), offered bimonthly, instruct participants on how to write short stories, novels, film screenplays and plays. A film resulting in a Senior Artists Colony production is being developed in this class.

[Poetry in Motion](#), a group that meets bimonthly, provides the opportunity for poets living in the Artists Colony to express and share their work and that of poets who inspire them.

[Visual Arts](#) are conducted as a series of ongoing workshops, including Mask Making, Beginning Drawing, Beginning and Advanced Nude Figure Drawing, and Explorations in Art, which explores different artistic mediums and techniques. Seasonal Gallery Exhibitions are held four times a year and feature individuals or groups. Residents assist in mounting and setting up the exhibition, while a curator and the Artists Colony Committee jury the works to determine what will be featured. Artists within and outside the Colony are invited to submit works.

Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts

San Francisco, CA

The Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts (CEYA), a program with the Institute on Aging in San Francisco, CA, sponsors a wide variety of apprenticeship and mentorship programs in which older artists teach in schools, senior centers and at CEYA. Working with high schools, middle schools, local arts agencies, and community centers, CEYA teams older and younger persons in collaborative, educational programming under the instruction of professional visual and performing artists. Playwrights, poets and musicians are carefully selected and trained by geriatric professionals and educators to work with older adults and youth. CEYA provides the infrastructure for planning, designing and implementing cross-generational projects and community presentations, such as local art exhibits. Many of the artists and audiences are composed of diverse populations, including Asian and Russian immigrants.



[My Story Art Exhibition](#) is one of the many art exhibitions sponsored by CEYA. For one year, residents and members of a low-income housing development for people age 62 and older, in collaboration with the San Francisco Tenants and Owners Development Corporation, worked creatively with professional artist Zimou Tan and Artistic Director Jeff Chapline in drawing and painting. Subsequently participants worked on self-portraits and reminiscences that were exhibited in a variety of mixed media.

[Home Services](#) allows the artist to launch the participant on a plan of constructive and empowering creative work. Projects are tailored to the abilities, special interests and talents of the participant and artist in collaboration. Activity sessions are 1.5 hours, with a minimum of one session per week. After an assessment, the participant and assigned artist develop a 12 session collaborative project that takes place in the home.

Cornerstone Theater Company

Los Angeles, CA



Cornerstone is a multi-ethnic, ensemble-based theater company that commissions and produces new plays, bringing together professional artists and people of many ages, cultures and levels of theatrical experience. Much of their work centers on training new generations of community-based theater artists, where older participants serve as mentors and role models, educating younger people through their experience and work ethic.

[Cornerstone's Institute Summer Residency](#) occurs every summer. The 2005 Residency worked closely with local populations to create a bilingual adaptation of Garcia Lorca's classic "Blood Wedding", entitled "Boda de Luna Nueva", or "New Moon Wedding". The production featured parents appearing onstage with their children, as well as three generations of one family performing together.

Cornerstone is now in the process of creating a production for its 2006 Institute. After collaborating with older adults and their caregivers in San Francisco, playwright Octavio Solis wrote "Lethe", a haunting play that explores the fragility of memory and how people prepare for the end of life. Set in a retirement home, the play features several roles for older adults. Community partners include staff, volunteers and residents from St. Anne's Home for the Elderly, the Institute on Aging's Adult Day Health Center and Hospice by the Bay.

Elders Share the Arts

Brooklyn, NY

Elders Share the Arts (ESTA) in Brooklyn, NY offers ongoing programming with professional artists including creative writing, story telling, visual arts and theater. Founded in 1979, ESTA has been dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging and to developing programs that build on this understanding. ESTA's methodology has come to be called "Living History Arts", which is a synthesis of oral history and art that engages older adults in literary, visual, or dramatic presentations.

The Writing from Life Experience Workshop

at Morningside Gardens Retirement and Health Services on the Upper West Side of Manhattan began in 1995. A group of 12-15 older adults, between the ages of 70-102, meet two hours weekly with writer Susan Willerman. Participants read from their prepared work and afterward discuss the writings that stimulate remembered experiences. Participants then write for 10-15 minutes on assigned subjects and share those writings. The class observes the imagery and rhythm of the piece and how it holds together as a story. Each May, a public reading is convened where friends, family and community members gather to listen to the writers read their work. Over the years, the group has developed skills that define them as writers, where the significance of their lives is recognized in the written and spoken word.



The Story Circle is conducted in local branches of the Brooklyn public library that are coupled with a neighboring senior center. Older adults are matched with a writer who shapes their oral reminiscences. Programs move from the oral to the written, where older artists conduct public readings, presentations and the making of books to anthologize the stories of participants.

Legacy Works employs a visual artist who works with older adults to transmit their memories and life experiences into visual art, such as painting, collage and photography. Each program culminates with a public art presentation in community-based sites (e.g., senior centers, adult day health facilities, nursing homes) or in broader public venues. For example, a major exhibition of the artwork will be held in May 2007 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

The Pearls of Wisdom is a touring ensemble of older storytellers who share their richly faceted lives and the wisdom of their age and experience in crafted theatrical presentations that both educate and entertain audiences of all ages. These accomplished storytellers present in schools and in a wide range of cultural and community venues, including the Museum of the City of New York, Lincoln Center and the United Nations.

Golden Tones Chorus

Wayland, MA



The Golden Tones is a sixty-person chorus founded in 1988 by professional singer Maddie Sifantus who directs the singers. It began as a small sing-along group to match the interest of several patrons of the Wayland Senior Center and has evolved, through the interaction of members and Sifantus, to a vibrant performing chorus of

individuals from Wayland and the Metrowest area of Boston. Its purpose is to maintain and administer an older adult chorus to improve the quality of life for chorus members and the community through art and song. The Golden Tones travel to 25 or more towns each season, performing 60 concerts a year for nursing homes, senior clubs, churches, community events, conferences, and audiences of all kinds. The group receives support from the Town of Wayland, as well as small grants from area Cultural Councils.



Intergeneration Orchestra of Omaha

Omaha, NE

The Intergeneration Orchestra of Omaha brings together younger and older performing artists through the universal language of music. Their concert season runs from September through April, with a schedule of 10 to 15 concerts each year. The orchestra is presently comprised of sixty musicians ranging in age from 12 to 85 years. Musicians may audition if they are over 50 years of age or under 25 years of age. The Orchestra is sponsored by the Eastern Nebraska

Office on Aging, which contributes a variety of in-kind services to assist with the administration of the program. It is funded through grants, donations, memberships, fundraisers and performance fees.



Kairos Dance Theater

Minneapolis, MN



Kairos Dance Theatre in Minneapolis, MN is an age-integrated dance theater that presents 15-20 public performances throughout the community, including traditional concert venues, parks, libraries, nursing homes, museums, festivals, conferences and community centers. Performances are interactive and inclusive, allowing audience members to join in the dance. The memories and life experiences of older artists are tremendous sources for artistic material and facilitate relations between dancers and audiences of all ages.

[The Dancing Heart Program](#), established in 2001, is conducted by professional dancers who provide in-depth opportunities for individual, artistic development and community connection. Long-term Dancing Heart partnerships may include the collaborative development of a performance piece that older adults share with the community through informal gatherings and public performances.

[Dancing Heart Caregiver Training Program](#) offers introductory and intensive courses in dance, as well as residency workshops for care providers, artists, family members and other individuals involved in therapeutic recreation, adult day care, assisted living and related environments. Participants are trained in dance, movement improvisation, music and storytelling.

Levine School of Music

Washington, DC

Levine School of Music, based in Washington, DC, is a nonprofit community music school accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. Founded in 1976, Levine serves more than 3,500 students on campuses in Northwest and Southeast DC, Maryland, and Virginia, offering individual and ensemble instruction in more than 20 instruments and voice, with classroom instruction in theory, history, and music technology.

[Senior Singers' Chorale](#) is composed of 130 adults between the ages of 65-98 years who come from various Virginia retirement communities. Now into its fourth year, The Chorale studies and performs under the direction of Levine School musician Jeanne Kelly. They rehearse biweekly and perform in venues throughout the Washington area including the Kennedy Center, the National Building Museum and at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.



[The New Horizons Band](#) is an instrumental ensemble at the Arlington Campus of the Levine School of Music. Begun in 2004, Levine School musician, Paul Norris, conducts the band. The New Horizons program was founded in 1992 at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, and the New Horizons concept applies to adults typically over the age of 50 in large band programs as well as smaller ensembles such as orchestras, chamber music groups, and Dixie bands. The program currently involves more than 75 local New Horizons Bands in the United States and Canada.



Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

Takoma Park, MD

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is a professional company of dance artists that creates, performs, teaches, and engages people in making art. Beginning in 1976, The

Dance Exchange has performed groundbreaking new dance works, performed by a cross-generational company internationally, throughout the U.S., and at home in the communities of Maryland, Washington DC, and the Mid-Atlantic region.

[Dancers of the Third Age](#) is composed of dancers from 18–80 years who have studied, rehearsed and performed in venues throughout the country. They combine dance with realistic imagery, the spoken word, personal experience, philosophy and social commentary. Community Workshop classes are tailored to a wide variety of groups in settings such as schools, senior centers, hospitals, healthcare facilities, places of worship, prisons, community centers, corporate and government offices. Community-wide participatory events explore social issues, including education, aging, healthcare and community history.

[We are Still Crossing Workshop](#) is a Dance Exchange Initiative for older adults. The origin of *We are Still Crossing* was created in 1986 to commemorate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. During the work's creation, Liz Lerman and other company members interviewed local older adults – many of whom had traveled to America themselves through Ellis Island – to tell their stories and use their “voices” within this movement work. The composition of *We are Still Crossing* has since endured and grown. Currently, the program runs in three phases: First participants commit to a series of preliminary workshops, led by a Dance Exchange team. The participants are then placed alongside an intergenerational group of budding artists and community members who serve as educators and choreographers. The final group trains for the culminating *We Are Still Crossing* workshops that prepare them for performance.



[Imprints on a Landscape: The Mining Project](#) is the first in a series of "Senior Masters" projects to be developed by older artists through The Dance Exchange. *Imprints* is a multi-media work involving movement, text and visual imagery that utilizes the full professional company of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. The central theme of the work is the idea of how we endure—as individuals, as a culture and as living entities in balance with our physical world. The work is developed through research conducted by Martha Wittman, who draws on her family's background in the coal mining culture of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Wittman also use materials gathered from mines, historical societies and museums of the area.

Luella Hannan Memorial Foundation

Detroit, Michigan

The Hannan Center for Senior Learning, a program of the Luella Hannan Memorial Foundation, encourages older adults to contribute their knowledge, skills and perspectives in artistic ways, benefiting themselves and the greater community. The Center creates arts opportunities that promote personal expression and well being.

[Paths We've Walked: Listening To Our Elders](#) is a project with older artists and writers from Hannan House who write poetry, assemble stories, compose songs and create installations dedicated to the theme of walking. The program concludes with a festival featuring readings, music, and an exhibition by older artists.

[Ellen Kayrod Gallery](#) at Hannan House has been exhibiting monthly installations of the work of Detroit-area artists, 60 years of age and older, since the early 1990s. Artist Mary Herbeck serves as curator of the juried exhibitions. In addition, The Hannan Cafe provides an exhibition space for non-juried works by older artists.



OASIS Institute

St. Louis, MO



OASIS is a national, nonprofit education organization designed to enhance the quality of life for older adults through arts, humanities, wellness and volunteer programs. It offers programs in drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, art and music appreciation, theater, creative writing, dance and voice through a national network of community-based OASIS centers in 26 U.S. cities. OASIS now serves several hundred thousand individuals across the country.

[The OASIS Journal](#) is an annually published anthology featuring the juried art of older writers and photographers. Anyone 50 years of age or older is eligible to submit compositions and accompanying artwork or photography to the OASIS Journal. New writers are encouraged to apply. Submissions selected for publication in the OASIS Journal are automatically entered into a contest for Best Poetry, Best Fiction and Best Non-Fiction. The judges are all published artists and editors and winners receive a cash prize and special mention in the OASIS Journal.

Seasoned Performers

Birmingham, AL

Into its 23rd year of touring, the Seasoned Performers is a unique older adult theatre troupe located in Birmingham, Alabama. The program provides older adults with opportunities to participate in theatre, serves as a training base for those who wish to increase their knowledge of theatre arts and brings live theatrical performance to audiences of all ages. The company has commissioned over 25 new scripts by professional Alabama writers and engages guest artistic directors for touring productions. Presently, the troupe consists of twenty-five actors ranging from 57 to 90 years with a total of fifty members. The Seasoned Performers tour their plays and readings to as many as 100 different community sites each year, playing to over 7,000 audience members. The program relies on community support from a variety of sources, including the Metropolitan Arts Council, the Jefferson County Office of Seniors Citizens Services, the Birmingham Arts and Culture Commission, and the Alabama State Council on the Arts.





Stagebridge Oakland, CA

Stagebridge is the nation's oldest Senior Theatre Company. Based in Oakland, California, it is an arts organization that uses theatre and storytelling to bridge the generation gap and to stimulate positive attitudes toward aging. Stagebridge's intergenerational programs feature senior theater productions, storytelling in schools, acting classes for seniors, and writing contests for children.

[Intergenerational Matinee Performances](#) provide live multicultural theatre for grades K-6 in various schools in the area. Each play adapts popular children's books about grandparents from around the world. The cast is ethnically diverse and multigenerational, ranging in age from 10 to 80 years. The matinee package includes a free teacher's guide and the opportunity to meet the actors and tour the area.

[Student Storytelling Workshop](#) professionally trains storytellers to guide students toward a better understanding of the principles and skills for telling traditional tales and stories from their lives. The workshop includes topics such as structure and sequence, shaping environmental detail to create character and sense of place and performance techniques.

[Seniors Reaching Out](#) convenes workshops in music, acting, and storytelling and supports performances of original plays performed by older actors throughout the community. These venues include senior centers, retirement communities, convalescent centers, clubs, libraries, and houses of worship.

[Grandparent Tales Writing Contest](#) is an annual contest for Bay Area school children, conducted by theater members, that includes visits to schools to educate youth on how to interview their grandparents (or other older relatives) and write their stories.

[Storybridge](#) is a mentoring project with older adult storytellers who work with elementary schools to share their personal stories and traditions. The storytellers encourage and assist the children in telling their own stories, including those of their grandparents.